

More Jiwere-Baxoje fantastic creatures from the Dark Side

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Abstract: This paper continues the inventory of fantastic creatures who were not especially friendly to humans, portrayed in the tales of the Otoe-Missouria and Ioway peoples, as documented in the collections by James Owen Dorsey, Gordon Marsh, Alanson Skinner, and others. Some of these creatures were included in Greer (2019). The supernatural beings include the Great Serpent, geological formations gifted with the ability to think and move, as well as the Dark One. I will explore their attributes specific to these traditions, make comparisons to other Siouan tribes and their folklore for parallels, and utilize the Thompson motif index for North America for further notes on these elements' distribution across Native culture regions. The full set of Fantastic Heroes remains open for future work.

Keywords: Otoe-Missouria, Ioway, Siouan folklore, Thompson motif index

1. Introduction to a generalized Siouan cosmology

While the focus of the paper will be upon stories and lexicon of the Otoe-Missouria and Ioway tribes, I would like to begin with including beliefs also documented among the closely related Hoočak nation, and the Dhegiha-speaking tribes as well (namely the Osage, Kanza, Quapaw, Omaha, and Ponca). Key elements are shared, not just linguistically, but in terms of general clan structures, subsistence patterns, kinship systems, and folklore. I am also beginning with the latter two groups because they have been linked by many contemporary archeologists with the site of Cahokia, and its area of influence, up into Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri in particular, which tie in with the ancestral homelands for most of these peoples.

In the general three-level cosmos documented for the Dhegiha speakers (Fletcher & La Flesche 1911 and Diaz-Granados et al. 2015) and the Hoočak (Radin 1948), there are three interconnected domains. Above is the Sky World (Sun, Birds, Thunderbirds...), then the Middle World (where humans live, the surface of the Earth), and finally, the Underworld (Darkness, underneath the earth, the place of water, water spirits, snakes, and horned underwater panthers. It is associated with females and fertility.) Upon the surface of the Middle World, there are places that serve as portals to the world below; such liminal places¹ include bodies of water, springs, rivers, and caves.²

¹Liminal is the term used by Victor Turner in his study of human rituals. Part of the action of creating sacred space is to be separated from everyday life, the profane and ordinary. It comes from the Latin root *limin* or *limen*, meaning 'threshold' (LEXICO: Oxford English and Spanish Dictionary, Thesaurus, and Spanish to English Translator, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/liminal>). Thresholds are the physical limit delineating inside vs. outside of a building, being neither fully interior, nor fully exterior, but 'betwixt and between' in location.

²Lewis-Williams & Dowson (1988) did seminal work on the importance of shamanistic art on stone, and described

In the Osage interpretation of the Cosmos, there is an Eternal Battle between the forces of Underworld and Sky. I am interpreting LaFlesche and the other authors' complex theology here in a somewhat simplified form, but it seems to me that one implication of that conflict is that humans can be helped or hindered by all powers, and that this conflict is necessary for life on the Middle World to continue—an eternal yin/yang which cannot be resolved. This tension favors the Sky World in many ways but does not split into a true duality of good vs. evil as is found in the Near Eastern traditions such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Under World brings not only darkness and death, but the Moon, and the feminine powers of fertility and water. Likewise, the Sky World brings the sun and rain, but also the storms, lightning, and fire. Each is necessary, full of power, and terrible in its own right.

Now, we will look specifically at accounts given of Iowa cosmology proper. Long ago, however, things were different. In a mythic time before the historic period/the present, strange and awe-full creatures populated the earth in large numbers and had to be destroyed or reduced in number before puny humans could survive. Foster (1994) summarized traditional Ioway cosmology in his thesis about sacred Bundles. I should have consulted him before doing my paper last year, but I am happy to note that his conclusions based on the earliest accounts are quite similar. Let me share a quote here:

“The destructive forces were the Underworld Powers as represented by the *ischéxi*, the horned water panther or serpent, ghosts, monsters, giants, and little people (though these last could be good). On top of all these were many unnamed *wakándas* dwelling in bluffs, water, timber, high rocks, mounds, and even household utensils (Dorsey 1894; Skinner 1925, 1926). The world was conceived of as being a lodge, as well as being multi-tiered.” (Foster 1994).³

1.1. Beneath the surface of Earth/Underworld

As humans rely on a certain amount of light for their keen sense of vision, it is not surprising that darkness itself can be feared. We can document a similar attitude for the Baxoje-Jiwere peoples. One example of the attitude toward the dangers of the Under World is found in the writings of Whitman and Skinner. Both Ioway and Otoe-Missouria elders repeated warnings from the old people for the young people who went on their Puberty Fast alone in the wilderness: “[D]o not speak to creatures coming up from the Water or from under the Ground. They could kill you, you must not speak to them” (Skinner 1915:740)! Consider the following teaching for those about to embark on this sacred venture:

“Now it is time for you to use the burnt stick (i.e., rub charcoal on your face) and let your tears drop on our mother, the earth, that she may pity you and help you in the future. Find out your way; the creator will help you. He may send a voice to speak to

rock faces as ‘membranes’ between the spirit world and this plane of human reality; many cultures around the world associate stone with the cold permanence of death, but also linked to the spirit of ancestors. Stanley (2004) documented the spiritual significance of art upon certain rock formations in Iowa, possibly linked to the ancestors of Iowa, Otoe, and Missouri today.

³Pertinent information from chapter 3 of Foster’s (1994) thesis can also be found online at the following address: <http://ioway.nativeweb.org/iowaylibrary/sbchapter3.html>

you and prophesy whether or not you will be of any account in the tribe. Maybe you'll dream of the thunder or some other one above, one of its assistants or servants. They may give you long life. Weep for help from the sun. The sun is a great power.

If something comes up out of the water or the earth, don't accept it. Throw it away. Pay no attention to it. Don't listen at all or you'll soon die. That is the way to do. Be careful, there are both heavenly and evil powers, and the latter will try to deceive you. You must be willing to fast, for, if Wakanda helps you, you will be a great man and a protector of your people. You will become famous." (Skinner 1925:739-740) (Emphasis added).

1.1.1. Serpents and taboos

Snakes move easily underground and upon water as well as land. This speed and ease of transition between domains, plus the venomous powers of certain species, makes them very *wekan* 'mysterious, sacred, powerful' indeed! Note there were normally strong taboos around killing any kind of serpent (Marsh n.d., 'The Twins').⁴ In one historic account, the Anglo-American missionary makes note of an occasion when some children encountered a snake on a trail away from the village. They hurried home, so that the priest/shaman could come back, and offer the serpent some tobacco. This sacred offering would help ensure the safety of tribal members as they travelled and possibly encountered this sacred creature in the future (Hamilton n.d.).

Secondly, there is a direct connection between the proper time to tell sacred myths known as *wekan* and the season of snake hibernation. Telling *wekan* in the 'summer season' is taboo because it would attract these dangerous creatures to one's abode, or the next day, one might step on a snake (Meeker 1901:164). The Hidatsa had another association between snakes, the earth, and women, which was that only those families who had the Snake bundle 1) knew how to make pottery and 2) were allowed or sanctioned to do so (Bowers 1992:373 and Duncan & Diaz-Granados 2015:102).

The mysterious appearance and disappearance of these legless reptiles shows their ability to literally navigate between the Middle World and the Under World. Finally, the rather unique trait of snakes shedding their skins represents new life and eternal rebirth or resurrection. But these snakes are ordinary creatures, not limited to mythic times or supernatural appearances.

1.1.2. The Great Serpent

In addition to the ordinary snakes, there are also tales of a mythical World Snake or Great Serpent, who is a consort with the Old-Woman-Who-Never-Dies (also known as First Woman).⁵ She slept with this powerful creature first, then afterward, she also slept with the Sun (also known as First Man). Thus, the sacred woman's bodily cave acts as the literal conduit through which she will transmit the underworld power to the sky world also. This belief in a holy woman's vagina as a

⁴This is direct contrast to the Hero Twins' lack of fear/respect; they cook them up, make rattling curtains for a doorway, etc. (Marsh n.d. 'The Twins' and Skinner 1925:429).

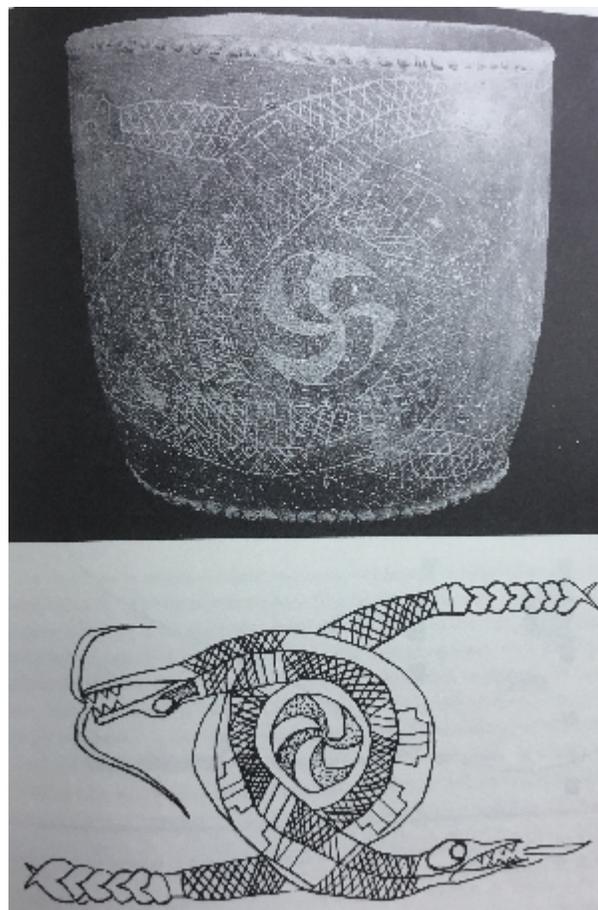
⁵The feminine balance to the masculine warrior/sun/Upper World power is widespread in Native North America. Note that Mississippian figures such as the Birger sculpture depict a female deity who is hoeing the back of the Great Serpent, and has squash growing up her back. Her lips are parted, in the stylized depiction of death, signifying that she is also the keeper of the souls of the dead. These fascinating images are crafted of catlinite, the same sacred red stone used for pipes (Prentice 1986).

medium for acquiring and passing on power parallels a custom found among the Mandan and Hidatsa. A wife might ceremonially mate with an older Warrior/Doctor at the request of her husband; then, after that ritual sexual union took place, her husband would then acquire that male elder's sacred power when the husband was reunited sexually with his wife again (Bowers 1992 and Peters 2000:40-41).

The Hoocak Medicine Dance was a tribal religious society found among the Otoe-Missouria, Ioway, and many non-Siouan Midwestern neighboring tribes as well. Radin (1950) noted that members of the Hoocak Medicine Dance used poetic names for snakes: "Spirit Walking Soldiers" and "Crawling Soldiers". The reasoning was to avoid their hearing/noticing the use of their true name during a ceremony, and thereby being naturally curious enough to be summoned to the event. Similar poetic names might be used ceremonially for other powerful creatures, especially the bear.

The Osage had a Rite of Reincarnation for the Dead that invokes the Great Snake. This sacred being, the Great Snake is quoted in the ritual as saying "[e]ven though the little ones pass into the realms of spirits, they shall, by clinging to me and using my strength, recover consciousness" (La Flesche 1975:368, quoted in Diaz-Granados et al. 2001:488).

Figure 1: Engraved rattlesnakes intertwined around cosmos on pot, Cagle Lake, Missouri (O'Brien 1994:180-181)⁶



⁶I am using this image as a generic example of the frequent imagery of ordinary snakes, especially venomous

The Kanza had a mythical flying snake called *wéts'a tazhi lishka*. It was so powerful that just seeing it would mean that person must die. Note also that there was an old woman who used to hold supernatural communication with them (Cumberland & Rankin 2012:214; James Owen Dorsey is their original source). Compare this mythic being to the imagery of a Winged Serpent engraved upon Mississippian ceramic vessels such as those found at the site of Moundville, Alabama (Reilly 2015:140). Look at the following illustrations. The first is an engraved jar in Fig. 1 above. Figure 2 is from the incredible Spiro Mounds site near present day Ft. Smith, Arkansas. The images are included, not because we want to directly link the Kanza with these specific sites, but to document the widespread nature of this belief system, and its roots in the overall Mississippian multicultural and poly-linguistic complex (cf. Kaufman (2014) for a study of linguistic diversity in the southern Mississippian region).

Figure 2: Hemphill-style Winged Serpent Pot, Moundville, Alabama (Beam 2018)



Now that these various associations of snakes and the underworld have been established, what about the liminal places such as caves /chasms, etc.? They have a certain amount of ambiguity, ones such as rattlesnakes and copperheads. However, the stepped design in the center of their backs, and the circular motif in the center may actually denote the sacred four snakes put by Earth-maker as anchors of the earth at its four corners, to stop it from spinning (Radin 1950). Since the stepped design and the circular motif (there defined as the cosmos) are both found in the Osage symbols still recognized in the 20th century (Burns 1994), I am speculating on the interpretation. O'Brien (1994) does not interpret this artifact in symbolic terms.

since the Earth is our Grandmother, but they also are portals to the third dark and terrible realm, which is also powerful, and brings a necessary balance for the cosmos, like day and night, rain and the roots of plants under the soil.

Cracks in the Earth and caves being perceived as portals to that Underworld are extremely widespread concepts. How might this relate to the practice of ritual, and rock art? Perhaps best known is the fascinating work by David Lewis-Williams finding parallels between San (South African) shamanic rock paintings as well as Upper Paleolithic cave art in Europe. Remember that complete sensory deprivation such as one finds in total darkness and silence deep inside cave passages is one avenue for entering into a trance state, suitable for spiritual seeking.⁷

The topic of chasms and caves brings us to our next unusual fantastic being, which is neither anthropomorphic nor of the avian/animal world. Rather, it is a part of the geology of the world itself. It is quite similar to the way humans have viewed volcanoes as sacred and living creatures, too.

2. Geologic monsters

2.1. Hill That Swallows Living Creatures (humans, sometimes animals, too)⁸

2.1.1. Swallowing Earth/the Devourer

Considering caves, chasms, perhaps even landslides and earthquakes, we may be able to relate this important motif to actual specific geological features or processes, including the very real dangers of the many caves all over North America. In his survey of Native American narratives, Thompson categorized this recurring story element as “#158. *Sucking Monster (G332)*. *Giant, sometimes represented as a giant hall or cave, sucks in victims... includes versions found for the Crow, Hidatsa, Wichita, and Pawnee. To avoid repetition, since most are also on #159, the majority are listed there: #159 Monster killed from within (K952)*. Relevant tribes include Osage, Ponca, Dakota, Winnebago, and again the Caddoan-speaking Pawnee (Thompson 1966:321, 364-365).

There is not a single shared name for this monster, which appears in three of our major Jiwere-Baxoje folklore collections, both Dorsey in the 19th century, as well as Skinner and Marsh from about 1910-1936.⁹ It is interesting to add here that we may be able to tie this tale to a particular known cave. The Ponca were said to have found the Wind Cave in the Black Hills, and they called it *Pah-hah-wah-tha-hu-ni*, ‘the place that sucks in/the hill that swallows in’ (Howard 1995:20).¹⁰ Today the cave is a national park today, in part because of the unique characteristic of air flow

⁷Picture Cave includes ‘deep cavern’ work also, but there are signs of torches having been regularly used there, whether for the original artist to see, or for initiates to witness the sacred stories illustrated on the rock walls, it is hard to say. But the association between walls of a deep cave and contact with the spiritual world is still relevant, either way (Diaz-Granados et al. 2015).

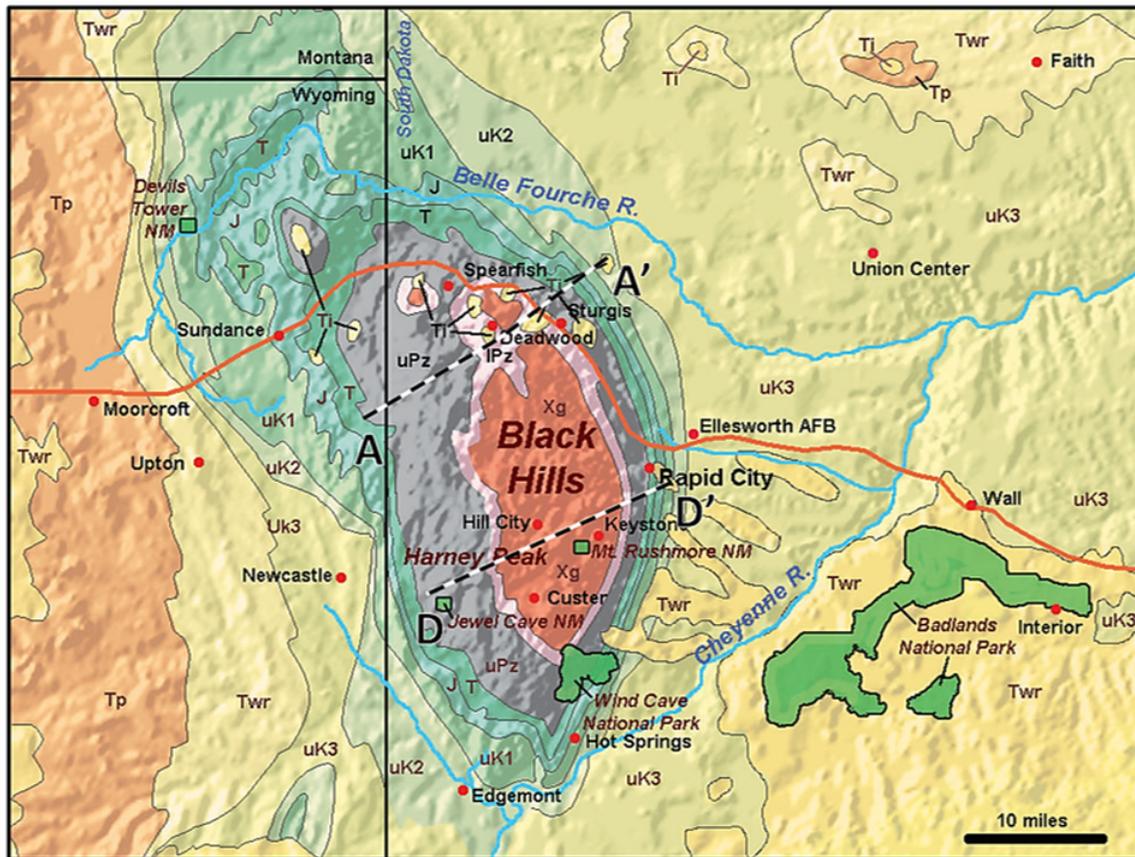
⁸Motif #159 also had a subset (a) #F913 *Victims rescued when swallower is killed*, represented by Osage, Ponca, Dakota (Thompson 1966:321).

⁹Skinner collected tales from various Ioway people, but many were from Robert Small, while Marsh relied heavily upon Mrs. Small.

¹⁰From a manuscript written down in 1949 by an elder southern Ponca man dictating it to a younger Ponca man. A copy was kept in a safety deposit box for safekeeping before he shared it with Howard! His ethnography was published originally ca. 1965.

between the outside air, moving inward (hence ‘sucking in’). See Figure 3, illustrating that this unique cave is well within the traditional hunting and travelling range of the IOM, Dhegiha, and many other Siouan groups.

Figure 3: Map of Wind Cave, also known as ‘He-sucks-them-in’ (www.geowyo.com)



Two versions of this popular motif use the term *Uye* ‘Vulva/Vagina’, while the others call it ‘the Hill that Swallows up (People)’ or ‘the Devourer’. It is found in both a Trickster story (Hare/Rabbit), as well as the Hero Twins’ extended adventures, which are best thought of as a series of connected narratives, similar to the epic journey of Odysseus. At one point, one narrator also calls it “he-sucks-them-in”, which parallels the Ponca name for Wind Cave mentioned earlier.

- (1) *mąyą kaigi wólahočeyą itąqe k^hE*
 land over.here **he.suck.them.in**-one there-it.is.lying DECL.MALE
 ‘In this land there was a Devourer’ [my free translation] (“The Twins”, Marsh n.d.:LN 107)

An Otoe Version Takes place in “Rabbit and His Grandmother” (Earth/Old Woman). See example (2) below.

The Rabbit and the Mountain.

An Oto Myth.

Told by J. La Fleche.

(2) (Dorsey Box 4800 Folder 305)

Aheri warashruje

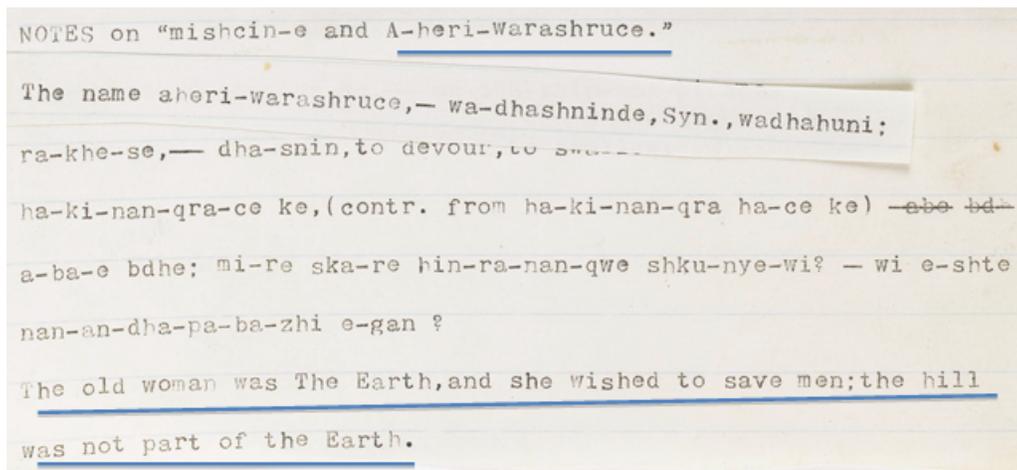
aheri wa-ra-shruje

hill/mountain 3PAT-by.mouth-draws.in

‘(he) draws them inside by his mouth’ (Dorsey n.d.:Folder 304, GoodTracks 2008)

Dorsey gives as synonym *Aheri wa-dhashninde*, < *dha-snin* ‘to devour, to swallow’, *wad-hahuni*, with no derivation/morpheme by morpheme gloss; he adds in his notes that the monster is NOT part of the earth! (Underlines added by author.)

Figure 4: Scanned image of Dorsey’s notes, emphasizing the distinction between Grandmother and the wicked Devourer (Dorsey Folder 304)¹¹



Consider the following example also. It is from Dorsey (n.d.:4800, Box 305)¹² again below with an Omaha version given; compare to his notes given earlier on the Hill not being part of Earth!¹³

2.1.2. Terms for a geologic monster in related languages

Since J.O. Dorsey was so interested in comparing different Siouan languages as he was studying several of them, we often get direct listing of similar terms in a second or third language, even as

naha qitceka arenye ki, e. Cike eta Aheri qaⁿtceqtci iyaⁿ itaŋe.

¹¹

Dorsey has no glosses here; I cannot tell for certain if this *Aheri qantceqtci* is another name rather than a verb about Rabbit going back to the mountain again, so I will exclude for the time being (*ibid*). However, the fact that iyan follows the lengthy construct suggests it is at least a compound noun here.

¹²His second drafts preparing to gloss a text are in a different folder, as are the actual translated English versions.

¹³Dorsey is not consistent in his spelling. We have alternates *wa-racrutce* and *wa-rashruce*; possibly an evolution in orthography?

he was trying to focus on translating a story in a different language. Such is the case here, where Dorsey's notes in the Otoe tale go on to discuss what the equivalent words would be in Omaha, too.

See Figure 3 below for the Dorsey's own typed manuscript of his translation for "Rabbit and Grandmother"; the Notes include the Omaha version; compare to notes in the transcription presented earlier about Hill not being part of Grandmother Earth (Dorsey n.d.:Folder 305).

Figure 5: More Dorsey emphasis on *Aheri* as separate from Grandmother Earth (Dorsey n.d.: Box 4800, Folder 305)

NOTES.

The old woman was The Earth, who wished to save the Indians. The Mountain, Aheri, Aheri-waracrutce, or Ahe-waracrutce, was no part of The Earth.

In the Omaha version, this mountain is named, Pahe waʔahuni. Aheri (or Pahe), hill or mountain; waracrutce (or waʔahuni), the devourer, literally, He who draws them into his mouth.

Figure 6: Additional Dorsey emphasis on *Aheri* as separate from Grandmother Earth (Dorsey n.d.: Box 4800, Folder 305)¹⁴

old woman. The rabbit said, "I have killed Aheri-warashruce." The old woman said, "My grandson, how could you possibly kill Ahe-warashruce? It is very holy." "No, I have killed it," he said. "See the fat that I have brought home. The old woman saw the fat. She knew it. She knew in her heart what the rabbit did; but she pretended that she did not know. The old woman said, "Why! my grandson, at last you have done a very good thing. Your mothers and your uncles will live." The End.

Folklorists such as Alan Dundes and others like to analyze this one as clear case of Male Birth Envy. Heroes bring forth life from dark living space through their stone tools and heroic actions! Carroll (1992) describes the subconscious feminine danger depicted across many Native American myths about caves that swallow, as related indirectly to the *vagina dentata* motif that

¹⁴ Waqupriⁿ taⁿra ki, e.

"(He) is very holy," she said (Dorsey n.d.: Box 4800, Folder 305).

occurs across both North and South America (Thompson 1966:115). Thus, I love the fact that in the Ioway version, the monster's name is actually *Uye* 'Vagina', because it is not buried in the subconscious at all, but bluntly put right out into the open (Skinner 1925:429-430, 497-498). As the earlier picture of his manuscript clearly shows, Dorsey repeats the consultant's words frequently that the *Uye* is not of this earth, because Grandmother Earth loves all her children and would never wish to harm them (Dorsey n.d.).

In the Ioway version of the same story, Grandmother rescues Hare the first time. The second time, he rolls hot stones down the hill into the cave to kill the *Uye*. This is another motif in Native North American tales, (Thompson 1966:324, Note 167 and 365); Motif #K951. *Monster killed by throwing hot stones into throat*. However, there were no Siouan, Caddoan, or Algonquin tribes mentioned in Thompson's documented examples.

2.1.3. Other Siouan and Caddoan parallels for the Swallowing Monster

In the Hoocąk version actually says it really is Grandmother Earth's *Uze*. She told Rabbit never to play near her genitals, but he disobeyed, and fell inside. It was a cave, full of animals and people. Radin basically translated it as "Womb of the World" (Radin 1948:103-104)! In this version, it is yet another violation of the incest taboo by the trickster. The many ways in which the naughty and foolish Rabbit tricks Grandmother into having sex with him is a frequent theme in these humorous stories illustrating the dire consequences of breaking strict taboos.

We can find additional related motifs: Sucking Monster G332: *Giant (sometimes represented as hall or cave) sucks in victims*; Note #158 includes Crow and Hidatsa, as well as Pawnee and Wichita (Thompson 1929:321). Now, we should add Osage to the list here as well, because in reviewing this piece for our proceedings, Justin McBride generously shared the Osage version of this story with me, called "the Devouring Mountain." It comes from the Osage texts collected by the same prolific fieldworker James Owen Dorsey (n.d.). In the Osage version, humans are sacrificing young women to appease the hungry mountain, and it is the Orphan who bravely decides to stop this dreadful practice by killing the Devouring Mountain himself and winning himself a lovely wife in the end. Note that the Orphan is another heroic figure shared with the Otoe-Missouria and Ioway traditions, although he is not credited with this particular adventure in the existing record of their lore. I suspect that a wider survey of all the Siouan mythic material would yield many additional parallels beyond those mentioned in this preliminary work.

2.2. A related theme: More dangerous geologic feature

The edges of the flat earth are cracks that open and shut. Different heroes ventured across these boundaries at the edge of the earth, one at each of the cardinal directions. It is clear in the stories that humans or animals might easily fall into the openings and have an awful, if unclear, fate. However there was also a Guardian being at each cardinal direction point also, but these guardians are portrayed as basically positive (Skinner 1925:438 and Marsh n.d.)

2.3. Burial mounds: Ghost brings an earthen feature to life

In this instance, we have a human-made geologic feature, rather than a naturally occurring one. However, since mounds have been being constructed in various forms on this continent for several

thousand years, it is possible that their antiquity may have shrouded (!) that human origin but maintained the spiritual nature and supernatural power associated with them. It is about the culture hero Rabbit (or Hare) and another of his many misadventures. He was alone and hungry, wandering over the land, when he discovered a Burial Mound upon which he takes refuge. There is a big taboo being broken here; the living ought never disturb the dead, especially those to whom one is not related. To Hare's surprise, the mound's ghost speaks and miraculously gives food to him. At first, he is grateful, but as he recovers, he notices the putrid odor emanating from the mound. Hare insults it by nicknaming it 'Death-Smell' so it chases him in anger and nearly catches him. It pulls his tail off, in fact (Skinner 1926:501, Tale #45).¹⁵ The imagery of a mobile and agile burial mound is quite striking and unusual. In fact, there is no such motif in the entire Thompson corpus as originally published (1966).

3. More darkness: Devil and dragon

3.1. The Evil Spirit/No-Good God

This particular topic is a difficult one, because it so obviously has parallels with the Judeo-Christian tradition of Satan. Christian missionaries needed to find a way to translate the fallen angel Lucifer into native languages in order to proselytize their congregations. That need opens the possibility that we are dealing with lexical constructions that may be relatively recent coinages, especially if used as a proper noun or name.¹⁶ However, a modern Christian theological usage does not negate the existence of pre-contact religious concepts. For example, *Wakanda* may be used to convey the Christian concept 'God', yet it stems from an ancient root meaning 'sacred/mysterious/powerful', and it is found in many traditional genres of music, including War Dance songs, as well as in prayers. In addition, as many elders sincerely communicated, they also had older terms such as *Mq-ʼu* 'Earth-Maker' that conveyed the notion of a Creator deity, long before Europeans arrived with their Bibles and worldviews. Such beliefs do not presuppose monotheism per se, but did perhaps provide parallels that lent themselves to incorporating the new religion with indigenous cosmologies.

Likewise, just because a term was historically used to represent Satan, does not automatically mean that the same term or something similar had not been present before contact, or that there was no conception of negative forces or evil in the world in traditional stories. With that cautionary note, and recognizing that it may be impossible to ever settle such issues satisfactorily,

¹⁵Earth effigies are found frequently in the regions where Jiwere-Baxoje speakers lived, including Oneota archaeological sites, both on a large scale, but also small ones. They might have served as visual markers of clan identity and ownership, according to Radin (1911:520-528). There are Oneota and even Archaic era echoes in this tale, because there are not just burial mounds (conical in shape), but lots of effigies, from Kansas all the way to Ohio! It is also noteworthy that the Kanza had a clan called the Earth Workers Clan *Manyinka Gághe* (Cumberland & Rankin 2012:279).

¹⁶French Jesuits established the first mission ca. 1720 at the trading outpost called Ft. Orleans on the Missouri River near present day Marshall, Missouri (Bray 1961:216-218). Ft. Orleans would have likely influenced both the Missouri and the nearby Osage village. Baptist and Presbyterian missionaries were present from the 1830s on, including Revs. William Hamilton and Samuel Irvin, whose publications on the Ioway language included a grammar, a hymnal of sorts, and a catechism. Their orphanage provided a home but also an assimilation environment for learning English, and Christianity. Our consultant Truman Dailey knew his maternal grandmother well. She had been sent to the Highland Mission school after her father drowned in the Missouri River, but she had fond memories of her time there (Stanley 1990; author's fieldnotes).

since there have been no Ioway and Otoe-Missouria peoples isolated from Euro-American religious beliefs for over 190 years, let us consider the occasional ‘dark’ or ‘evil’ figure occurring in otherwise traditional stories.

- (3) *Wak^hqda p^hi skuñi*
 god/spirit good -not
 ‘No-Good God’ (my free translation) *IOM*

Wanathuje is that famous prophet. This culture hero meets ‘the Evil One’ (in human-like form?) who verbally threatens him near the Mississippi River. The hero is wisely cautious of the dark power, so he goes home by a different route, to avoid contacting the evil one again (Skinner 1926). It might be important to note that *Wanathuje* actually parallels Christ in some ways since the hero tale states he was born of a virgin, and that he chose to come to the Ioways because they had the good sense to keep menstruating women separate from everyone else. Their ‘alone-houses’ protect the rest of the tribe from the power and danger represented by women’s overt sign of fertility, which made them ‘cleaner’ and holier than many other Indian peoples (according to the Ioway legend). There is a dangerous encounter with the Dark One, roughly paralleling the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. However, *Wanathuje* is also a warrior, husband, and father, who lives a VERY long life, rather than being a non-violent teacher, sentenced to death, placed in a tomb, then miraculously resurrected, so there are distinctly native aspects to his heroic identity as well (Skinner 1925:478-479).

Stories told and passed on primarily through an oral tradition, rather than a written one, do exhibit variation and change over time. Bits of information retained from sermons might filter their way into old stories, and become transformed, or vice versa. One of the frightening abilities the ‘No-Good God’ has is that he knows what everyone does, and hears what they say, even if it is whispered (Skinner 1925:444). That uncanny characteristic is certainly shared with the Judeo-Christian devil, although sorcerers and other beings may sometimes have had such powers also.

Perhaps related to the concept of an evil god, I found mention of another evil spirit in “The Twins” (Marsh n.d., Line 282) but with a different name:

- (4) *wanqxi p^hiškuñi*
 spirit (be)good-NEG
 ‘No-Good Spirit/Evil Spirit/Demon’ [my free translation] (Marsh n.d.:LN 282)

In the tale, a bad spirit (possibly a ghost) tries to kill Twins by making a sweatlodge too hot, but the wild Twin pours on too much water as the boys hide under a mussel shell. They triumph over that evil spirit, who runs away (Marsh n.d., “The Twins”). However, in Skinner’s version, the narrator went on to say that the boys “drove him into the next world, where he remains invisible, but evil. He is the evil one and knows whatever we do or even whisper. He is one of the tribe of Ghosts (*Wanagri*)” (Skinner 1925:440).

3.1.1. Parallels with other Siouan tribes of an Evil One

Among their closest linguistic relatives, the Hoocak, we see a few parallels, but nothing identical (unlike terms like Earth-Maker and *Wakanda*). Miner gave the Hoocak term *waxopiñišišk* ‘devil’ in his unpublished lexicon (Miner n.d.). While he did not analyze the form into its basic parts, I will attempt to do so here. The first word *waxopi* appears cognate with the Ioway-Otoe-Missouria (IOM)

word *waxobri*, *waxobj* meaning ‘sacred/holy/dangerous’ (applied to shamans/shape-shifters). The *pi* is a widespread cognate meaning ‘good’, with the oral vowel nasalized by the potential spread of nasalization across all a word’s syllables, from right to left, and vice versa (Kasak & Lundquist 2019).¹⁷ The final portion *nīšīšik* appears to be the morpheme signaling negation plus the diminutive (*nī* + *šīje* ‘little’ in IOM). The two syllable word ‘little’ has of course been first reduced to single syllable *šik*, ending in a stop of the same place of articulation in the sister language, Hoocak. Finally the single syllable was reduplicated, perhaps to indicate that there are numerous less powerful evil spirits about in the world.

A second potential parallel in Hoocak is their name for ‘Devil’s Lake’, but other than the word *wakq* ‘sacred/holy/powerful’, I will not try to break it down further. *Teewákqčqk* (‘eeja) ‘Devil’s Lake/Sacred Lake’, would offer tobacco there’ (Helmbrecht & Lehmann 2010:192). Devil’s Lake is the modern English name given by whites, associated with Native offerings of tobacco in order to cross the water safely. It is true that all the tribes considered it a sacred /mysterious site, but the monsters therein were Native, not Judeo-Christian ones. Note that the Hoocak consultant quoted in late 20th century narratives didn’t have the aforementioned negative view of the underground and underwater powers (Hartmann & Marschke 2010:66-67). This person made no mention of any Faustian “catch” in accepting such power.¹⁸ The three versions of their creation myth documented by Radin (1950) included many evil spirits, but they were distributed among all three Worlds, not just the underworld; in addition, the water-spirits under the earth were considered positive. The necessity of water for life no doubt underlies this aspect of the cosmology.

Folklorist Dorothy Brown collected a Hoocak story of a great primordial battle between the Thunderbirds of the Sky forces vs. the ‘Water spirits, or underwater panthers’ (Jarrell & Farmer 2019). The battle is what caused the rugged rock formations surrounding the lake, and not all of the water monsters were killed. Some survived and still live there (*ibid*)!

While the ‘Devil’s Lake’ is yet another example of things being ‘lost’ in translation between the two cultures, there is one similarity yet again in many traditions, namely the Faust-like bargain these underwater monsters might make. For instance, an Omaha man was fasting alone in the traditional manner, seeking a vision for spiritual power while out in nature, when such a creature appeared to him from beneath the water. It offered him a long life and great spiritual power, which he found appealing. The account goes on to warn that there was always a tragic catch to any gift received from a dark power, which would be hidden from the human recipient until it is too late. Usually it involved the death of a family member(s) (*ibid*). Dahlstrom (2003) also documented this theme for a Fox tale.¹⁹ An Otoe man told how he had been approached by an evil spirit, who offered him lifelong success in hunting deer. But in the end, this attractive power cost him his family, much to his regret (Whitman 1936).

¹⁷Note that certain consonants may prevent that nasal spread, such as a glottal stop [ʔ], and other stops such as [k] (Kasak & Lundquist 2019).

¹⁸A number of the Wisconsin Hoocak are still members of the Medicine Dance or Lodge, which may well have kept their belief system more insulated from Western influences, or conversely, this may represent a modern revision, in order to deliberately reject any potential parallels with Judeo-Christian cosmology. The ‘traditionals’ tend to keep separate from the members of the Native American Church, and vice versa.

¹⁹The Mesquaki Scroll Story had parents die; a winged person prevented death of the man with a bow, driving away the horned monster when it returned to take his life, too. The winged one said that the parents’ deaths were already payment enough (Dahlstrom 2003)!

Figure 7: Map of Devil's Lake, Wisconsin²⁰

A third name may relate to a native concept of a primordial Evil One, from the prolific collected texts transcribed by Radin in his early 20th century fieldwork. That word is capitalized as a proper name, just as he does for Earth-maker, and Hare, Turtle, etc. Unfortunately, he gives no gloss of the name, and I have not seen this name in any other documentation: “...*Herecgunina* and his attendants, that all the evil spirits and their helpers - those on earth, those from above, and those from below, as may as there were that had sharp teeth, as many as there were that had sharp claws, indeed, as many (evil spirits) as existed - that they were at work upon us” (Radin 1950: Line 80). I will not attempt a morphemic analysis, other than to observe a possible negation lexeme *-cguni-* ‘not’ (cognate to IOM) In modern orthography it would be *škunj* ‘not; (be) not’).

In another example, from stories told to me about the Native American Church, all members are cautioned from going out of the tipi during the all night service and wandering away from the spiritual safety of the group and the fire. One man who did not heed that warning is said to have met an evil being out there in the darkness. The ‘devil’ tempted him with the vices of cards and gambling, as well as with a promise of the sexual favors of women in the future (Truman Dailey in JDG fieldnotes).

- (5) Some Dhegiha groups’ terms for the Dark One
 - a. Kanza: *wakánda pízhi (ni)* ‘devil’ (Cumberland & Rankin 2012:275)
 - b. Ponca: *Wakánda péži* ‘the bad god’ (Howard 1995)

Howard also mentions that Dorsey (1894:371) gives the identical term but Dorsey believes they made this word ‘after they learned of him from the whites’ (1995:99). In a 1949 interview, one Ponca man explained they had always been monotheistic, but there were different ways to honor God. From the pipe ceremonies, War Dances, and Sun Dance to peyote church or Christian Church, all these ways were good, and it was the same God being honored by all. He went on to say: “*Wakánda-péži* is the same as the Devil to the Poncas. He is the bad god, and seeks to lead men into evil ways. There are other spirits or demons, but there is only one real God...” (Howard 1995:99).

²⁰This map is from an article of the Chicago Tribune from <https://tinyurl.com/ybq845td>.

3.2. There be dragons?

Whitman described an Otoe-Missouria tradition tied to a specific dangerous location, where it was known that a Horned being with seven heads sometimes arises out of the Mississippi River. The elders to whom Whitman spoke included those who had made the long trip from their original reservation in southeastern Nebraska. Thus, I would wager that their recollections were based on firsthand knowledge of the Missouri River, and hearing the stories associated with different places along that long, mighty body of water. Whitman did his fieldwork during the period 1935-36, which means that it had been more than 50 years since the Otoes had lived on the Big Blue Reservation up north (Whitman 1936). The telling and re-telling of such specific geographically linked tales suggests the importance of these beliefs to traditional members.

Thompson likewise discovered another multi-headed creature, which he curiously decides to call by the European term ‘dragon’: #289 LXXVIII. **The Seven-Headed Dragon**, with Osage, Ponca, Assiniboine, and Biloxi listed as Siouan groups who shared this motif (1966:358). A more general motif #287 *Additional Motifs, (f) Many-headed monsters* (B15.I) has no Siouan or Caddoan tribes listed, but he did include Northeastern tribes having *Horned serpent* under this same heading (Thompson 1966:357).

Lance Foster (p.c.) feels this is a clear Christian borrowing, from the Book of Revelations; he likewise considered the concept of human-like beings with wings to be a Judeo-Christian borrowing, plus Satan/Lucifer as the evil or no-good god. However, there are at least four winged little men with great power, Thunder-man, Lightning-man, Rain-man, and Little-god, described in the Hero cycle too (Skinner 1925:439; Marsh n.d.) Foster may well be correct, but at the very least, a general concept of evil beings ‘hell-bent’ on harming humankind appears to be of older status, because such beings play a central role in different culture hero cycles.

The horned serpent also had quite specific geographic associations with a great river. Consider the famous lost pre-contact rock art of the sacred and dangerous Piasa, which once overlooked the Illinois bluffs. It was documented by Marquette and Joliet on their voyage down the Mississippi River in 1763 (Reilly 2015:141). See Figure 8 for a line drawing based on their historic sketches. The priests’ native guides averted their eyes rather than look upon the powerful monster’s large image. Note there are similarities with the fearsome Horned Water Monster, especially the horns, the frontward facing of the head, and the very long tail (cf. Greer 2019 for an overview of the Horned Water Monster in IOM lore). Versions of the Piasa are also documented on artifacts from Spiro Mounds in Oklahoma.

As for ‘angels’ being necessarily derived from Judeo-Christian influence, I found evidence potentially contradicting that idea. First, the Radin mentioned positive spiritual beings who were winged in his *The Origin of the Medicine Rite among the Hoocak* (1950). Secondly, while it is further away in time and space, there is a fascinating artifact that might dispel that presumption that all winged anthropomorphic image must be of European influence. It is a Hopewell-era greenstone effigy pipe of a human-like figure with wings. Hopewell culture is slightly earlier and further to the northeast than the Mississippian complex in the earlier figures, in the A.D. 400-800 period. I suggest this elegant pipe in fact represents mythic beings such as Thunder-man and Little-god. (See Figure 9.) Note that it is commonly considered an image representing a shaman, since there is a widespread belief that shamans’ souls can leave their bodies, and fly to the spirit world. Alternate interpretations are always possible.

Figure 8: Reproduction of Piasa Pictograph as described by Marquette & Jolliet²¹

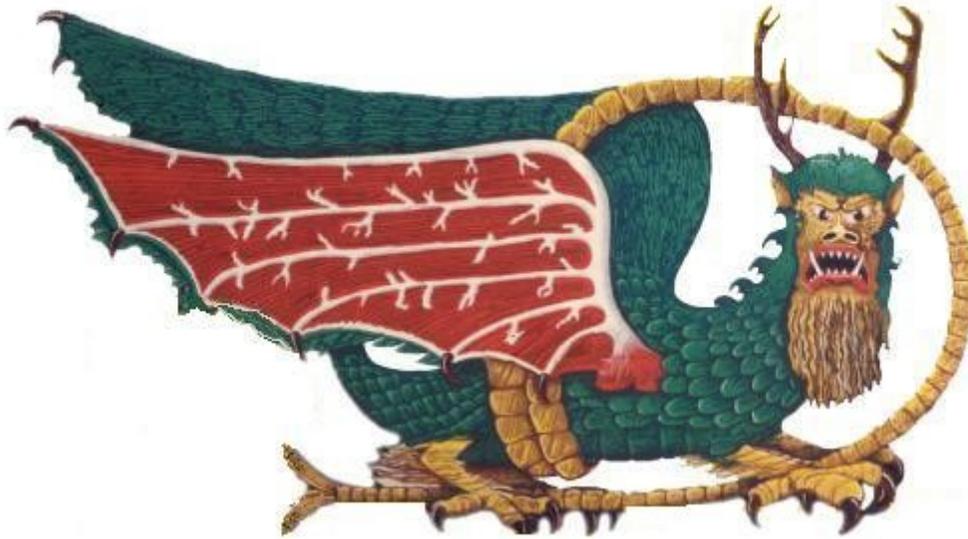


Figure 9: Human Effigy Pipe of Winged Shaman, Ohio²²



4. Conclusion

Beyond the joy of exploring these rich oral narratives, I hope to have demonstrated the intertribal nature of the tales, and illustrated the deep ties each people had to their specific ancestral homelands, whether it be the Cave that Devours near the Black Hills, or the Devils' Lake in Wisconsin. Furthermore, I hope to continue to look for the interplay of Jiwere language with material culture, from both ethnographic and archeological sources, as begun in Greer (2019), but which is really a continuation of the traditional Boasian unified four-field approach to anthropology. I found inspiration from archeologists who were integrating the study of Siouan (especially Dhegihan) folklore with their interpretations of upper Mississippian artifacts and cave art, beginning with the work of Duncan & Diaz-Granados (2000) and their associates Diaz-Granados et al. (2015). It is just one

²¹This picture is from <https://www.facebook.com/pg/Southwestern-CUSD-9-457567940940343/posts/> cf Reilly (2015:141).

²²Drawing by Richard Balthazar from Pre-Columbian art at www.richardbalthazar.com.

thread in the complex tapestry of interactions between the Siouan groups and their Algonquin neighbors, and especially their linguistic cousins, the Caddoans, and even the Iroquoians (cf. Chafe 1976 for an overview of the similarities in grammatical categories and relations of these three distinct language families which suggest a deeper time frame or ‘super-family’). Due to time constraints, I am once again left with at least one quite significant fantastic creature that cannot be discussed here. The haunting and very widespread tale of Grizzly Woman must wait yet a little longer.

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